

Turn On Youth to Careers in Environmental Protection •



and the Environment

Your Roadmap
for Launching
a Successful
Youth and the
Environment
Program

What Is the Youth and the Environment Program?

From its inception in 1990, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (U.S. EPA's) Youth and the Environment (Y&E) Training and Employment Program has been aimed at introducing economically disadvantaged urban and rural youth (ages 15–18) to career opportunities in the environmental field by combining summer employment with education, training, and hands-on experience. The program provides a blueprint for establishing youth awareness and training in the full spectrum of environmental arenas, including but not limited to:

-  Water Treatment and Supply
-  Wastewater Treatment and Collection
-  Solid Waste – recycling and household hazardous waste
-  Marine/Aquatic Environments
-  Environmental Justice
-  Health Education
-  Natural Resource Protection
-  Hazardous Waste
-  Energy Conservation
-  Wetlands Restoration

Although the initial Y&E programs were targeted to wastewater treatment facilities, they have since been expanded to include environments such as public zoos, municipal drinking water facilities, local health offices, local civic and environmental organizations, and city solid-waste authorities at locations throughout the United States. The programs are rooted in the establishment of synergistic partnerships among agencies and organizations that share complementary interests and goals. Creativity is the key to establishing a Y&E program—the possibilities are virtually unlimited.



“ The positive feedback and the change in the kids over the course of the program is rewarding. ”

Charles Conway, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission.

WORTH ITS WEIGHT

Time and again, the Y&E program has proved its worth in time, money, and commitment in the following ways:

For Students, the Y&E experience:

- Offers them a hands-on learning and earning opportunity
- Is an eye-opener to a host of environmental career possibilities
- Allows them to make a worthwhile contribution to environmental efforts in their community
- Provides them with an environmental awareness and an array of general skills (e.g., computers, reading, writing, science) and communication skills
- Instills life skills that prepare them to enter the workforce in a positive way
- Helps them gain a heightened sense of responsibility and personal satisfaction
- Provides them with the opportunity to gain personal information about the college experience through interaction with the youth coordinators, increasing their motivation to attend college
- Provides them with the opportunity to gain teamwork experience (high on the list of what employers seek in entry-level employees)

For Youth Coordinators, the Y&E experience:

- Provides job experience for both personal growth and the resume
- Provides experience in personnel supervision and mentoring

“ Partnership is your survival tool. It gives you the opportunity to collaborate on mutual interests and complement services to make it all come together as a whole. ”

Patricia Comeaux, Thorne
Ecological Institute,
Boulder, Colorado



- Opens the door to environmental career possibilities and contacts
- Provides excellent summer wages
- Provides the opportunity to gain teamwork skills
- Provides the opportunity to complete college internship requirements for graduation (if applicable)

For Host Facility Personnel, the Y&E experience:

- Provides a unique opportunity to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect, while serving as role models and mentors for the students
- Can have meaningful paybacks, including an enhanced sense of professionalism, the opportunity to hone skills, and the rewarding feeling of personal satisfaction
- Provides the opportunity to expose both high school and college students to career opportunities
- Provides an opportunity to showcase the environmental benefit of the facility (students will be future taxpayers)

For Host Facilities and Support Organizations,
the Y&E program:

- Offers them the satisfaction of building on their own missions by reaching out and engaging young people in meaningful activities
- Offers the satisfaction that much good can be accomplished with perseverance and a relatively small amount of money

- Allows future voters and citizens of the community to bring their experiences back to their families and friends, imparting an appreciation and recognition for the work done in these facilities to others in the community

The Essentials for Getting Started

PEOPLE

A successful Y&E program depends first and foremost on the commitment and team spirit of the people involved. Programs involve some or all of the following key players:

- ✓ **Champions** Individuals who ardently support the ideals of the program and work to make things happen. If you are reading this roadmap for launching a Y&E program, you are probably a champion.
- ✓ **Sponsors** Agencies and organizations that support the program through funding and operational assistance. Sponsors are typically the U.S. EPA and a partnering public or private entity, such as a local employment agency (e.g., department of labor affiliate) or civic organization. In a typical example, a local employment agency provides student wages and liability insurance (which many other sponsors cannot provide) and U.S. EPA funds are used to support and staff the program.
- ✓ **Support Organization/Agency** An entity that can accept a support grant from the U.S. EPA or other funding agency and take primary responsibility for organizing and operating the program. This is typically a non-profit environmental organization or a state or local environmental agency.
- ✓ **Program Director** The person responsible for bringing together the various program participants and working with them to plan the program—hiring the youth coordinators, finding the host site, identifying and bringing on board other sponsors, ensuring that students are engaged in meaningful work, organizing field trips, and generally overseeing, administering, and evaluating the program. Program Directors have traditionally been associated with the support organization.

✓ **Host Facility Personnel** The host site contact (preferably a person who is committed to the program, has the support of management, and is prepared to provide students with meaningful work) and the professionals (lab technicians, operators, maintenance personnel, field crew) who have various responsibilities at the site who work with the students both as role models and educators.

✓ **Youth Coordinator** A college student in environmental or related studies who is hired to work at the host site as a supervisor and role model to the students. He or she is the intermediary between the students and the program director, host site personnel, and sponsors. It is the job of the youth coordinator to keep a daily log of activities, help create an environment in which students bond and work together as a team, and voice the concerns of the students.

✓ **Educational Institution** Community colleges, colleges, or universities are the primary resource base for students who are interested in employment as a youth coordinator. The ideal learning institution is one that is in the locality of the host site so that youth coordinators can commute easily and so that a working Y&E partnership can be readily established with other participating organizations. Some colleges and universities see the Y&E program as an opportunity to provide student internships. Participating youth are potential candidates for future enrollment in college.

✓ **Students** Economically disadvantaged urban and rural youth (ages 15–18) who are interested in learning about career opportunities in the environmental field.

FUNDING

The size and scope of each Y&E program hinges on the level of funding. Available funding from the U.S. EPA, for example, has been used to support programs that range from one to several students. Programs enrolling larger groups of students typically leverage U.S. EPA funding by combining it with funding from a state or local Department of Labor (DOL) employment agency and a public and/or private entity. Costs vary with each program, depending on structure and complexity.



The key to our success is the fact that we involve ourselves in extensive planning from square one, and all players come to the table. It is truly a real partnership.

Ade Rasul, Executive Director, Woodcrest Center for Human Development, NYC

PARTNERSHIPS

A successful and effective Y&E program depends on creating and sustaining public and private partnerships among agencies and organizations with complementary interests. Partnerships are the key to leveraging resources, thereby making it possible to develop balanced programs that offer educational and employment opportunities to an optimal number of students.

Typically, partners are identified and fostered through the networking efforts of the program director and other champions. Partnering entities can include individuals from U.S. EPA, the organization receiving the grant from U. S. EPA or another funding organization that will organize and operate the Y&E program, a state environmental agency, a state or local DOL-supported employment agency, a local educational institution, a local environmental civic organization, and the host site.

PLACES

The student job site is referred to as the **host site**. The host must be willing to accept one to ten students to work at the site for approximately 5 to 8 hours per day, 5 days per week for 25 to 40 hours per week, to assign to the students meaningful tasks, and to commit personnel time to train and supervise the youth. A summer program typically runs from 7 to 12 weeks, depending how the program is constructed. Of course, there can always be variations in student numbers and work hours, particularly when there are multiple sites within a program. For example, there may be five to six students per site at five sites with a total of 25 to 30 students.

Possibilities for host sites are expansive, depending on the environmental activities in a particular area and the results of your networking and partnering efforts. Host sites can include wastewater and water treatment facilities, zoos, solid waste facilities, non-profit environmental associations, and local health departments.

An **education and training location** is needed to enhance work and learning experiences through classroom sessions in subjects such as workplace safety, computer skills, science, math, and career and college exploration. Contributory **field trip locations** should also be included in the curriculum. Field trips are typically designed to expose students to other environmental professions and/or issues (e.g., a brownfields site, an environmental restoration project). Partnerships can also extend to entities that will be serving as field-trip locations.

TEAMWORK

A successful Y&E program depends on teamwork. Participating entities must work together to plan the program agenda and reach agreement on responsibilities. Once the program is underway, a reporting procedure should be used to keep team members abreast of progress and identify any problems. Communication is essential.

LOGISTICS

The program director is responsible for providing appropriate work clothes for the students, such as work uniforms, safety-toed boots, safety glasses, and lab coats. In some cases, public transportation passes are provided to ensure access to the host site. Other items or services may be provided as required or if they will enhance the potential for success.

FLEXIBILITY

Program champions must be prepared to address and keep up with changes in funding opportunities, personnel, plans, and rules. In terms of program structure, there is always room for improvement and new ways to accomplish your goals. For example, you may find that you want to expand your program so that it is year-round—weekends and after-school. Many students have requested this type of option.



“ The Y&E program provides our students with a wonderful opportunity for internships. It also helps the college build bridges with the community and the high schools. We work closely with the Y&E team and help with program coordination and supervision. ”

Dr. Reid Strieby, Professor,
Bronx Community College

How to Make Your Y&E Program Happen

If you are planning to establish a Y&E program in your area, the time to get started is now. Here are some tips for starting up, planning, and launching a program:

➤➤GET READY

✓ **Network.** Networking is key to a successful Y&E program. Since funding is a prime consideration for starting a program, begin by checking with your regional U.S. EPA water or environmental education programs to find out about available Y&E funding. Once that ball is rolling, ask your U.S. EPA contact if he or she can give you any leads regarding potential partners (e.g., people in the state environmental agency, host sites) and provide examples of how other programs around the country have been set up. Find out which colleges or universities in your area have environmental degree programs and who to contact. Look for areas where there is a local employment agency that has a youth summer (or year-round) employment program, and find a contact. Solicit local community groups to gain support for the project and to pave the way for community acceptance and future opportunities. Successful networking hinges on personal interaction and relationship building.

✓ **Team up with program sponsors.** Get your local DOL-sponsored employment agency or youth employment agency on board. This is mostly likely to be a good match if the agency operates a youth employment program that complements Y&E program goals. Write up a memo of understanding that explains roles. The roles of the youth employment agency can include:

- Recruiting, interviewing and placing students (in cooperation with other team members)
- Coordinating with the program director in terms of rules and planning
- Coordinating with the youth coordinator regarding student evaluation and counseling
- Coordinating with the host site
- Ensuring compliance with youth employment rules
- Providing other related youth support services
- Handling paperwork associated with hiring and providing wages (e.g., timecards, payroll, insurance, health issues)

In the event that a DOL program is not available, you may want to seek out other local sponsors to provide wages and insurance. In some cases Y&E programs are operated using only U.S. EPA funds. These circumstances, of course, limit the number of students that can participate in the program. In other cases, students participate in the program on a volunteer intern basis. (This can make it more difficult to find students as most need to work their schedule around a paying job.) Recruiting, interviewing, screening, and placing students is one of the most crucial tasks associated with creating a successful Y&E program.

✓ **Team up with a host site.** Once you have secured a local sponsor, then you can look for a host site(s) in that area. This is where networking can help you scout the possibilities—check in with your contacts for potential host-site leads and then check out the leads. If there is a wastewater or a drinking water treatment facility in the area, pay it a visit. If there is an active environmental organization in the area that's involved in a big volunteer project (e.g., stream monitoring), pay it a visit. State and federal environmental agency contacts can serve as

valuable links to host sites. Each program area has its own unique set of host-site possibilities.

While most Y&E programs are stationed at one host site, there can be more than one host site. In this case, students are assigned to work at the facility closest to their home.

✓ **Team up with an educational institution.** Your partnership with a local college or university can contribute a lot to the success of your Y&E program. This institution provides your youth coordinator, a key player in the program, but it can also provide valuable support services.

✓ **Prepare and submit a proposal.** Prepare a scope of work that outlines your program, the goals and objectives, the partners and their contributing roles, the target youth group, the short-term and long-term outcomes, and the budget. The proposals must be prepared according to the guidelines of the funding agency (ies).

➤➤GET SET

✓ **Bring the team together to map out the strategy for the Y&E season.** Your program plan should clearly answer the five basic questions:

- **Who** will be responsible for what?
- **What** will the curriculum look like? What equipment, supplies, and paperwork will be required?
- **When** will certain steps be carried out? Youth coordinators and students must be notified of job openings, interviewed, hired, and prepped. Schedules must be developed and field trip dates arranged.
- **Where** will the students and youth coordinator meet each morning, take breaks, and eat lunch? Where will student job assignments be located? Where will field trips and classes be held? Where does the buck stop when problems arise?
- **How** will students get back and forth to work safely? How will students be transported for field trips? How will interviews be conducted and by whom? How will students be paid? How will the project be monitored and evaluated?

“One of the most rewarding elements of this program is that many students have told us that this experience has convinced them to stay in school and look to the future.”

Kirk Laflin, Executive Director, Partners for Environmental Technology Education



✓ **Develop the curriculum.** In addition to hands-on training, working side-by-side with host site personnel, the curriculum should include class work and field trips to educate students about various environmental subjects and issues and career and college opportunities. This program can link hands-on training to the enhancement of academic classroom learning in terms of math and science (e.g., computer literacy instruction). The nature of the curriculum will depend on the type of host facility and available resources. Again, it is essential that students have meaningful work and the opportunity to perform a variety of tasks.

➤➤ **PREPARE FOR TAKE OFF**

✓ **Have the essentials in place before the students begin work:**

- Outline of summer program schedule
- Host site preparation
- Hiring and prepping of youth coordinator(s)
- Student selection
- Transportation issues
- All necessary paperwork
- Field trips set up
- Work/pay procedures
- Purchase of supplies and equipment
- Work/curriculum scheduling and contingency planning
- Recognition program

➤➤GO

✓ **Attend to the primary concerns associated with the daily operation of the program during the student work period:**

- Conducting student orientation – familiarize students with the host facility and provide safety training
- Carrying out daily schedule
- Addressing day-to-day concerns – have a procedure in place
- Student coordinator responsibilities – he/she is the link to everybody
- Coordinating with student coordinator – have a procedure in place
- Expectations for students – make sure they know this from day one
- Monitoring and evaluation – an ongoing process
- Feedback and follow-up – have a procedure in place



➤➤FOLLOW-UP

✓ **Evaluate the program with an eye toward improvement.**

After the program is finished, bring all of the players together (November is a good time) to evaluate the summer and make the program adjustments that are so critical to improvement. Program evaluation provides the information needed by all parties to assess the program and make revisions, as needed. This follow-up is typically the responsibility of the program director. While monitoring and evaluation should be ongoing during the course of the work period, evaluation forms should also be developed that are specific to students, host facility supervisors, host site directors, and youth coordinators and distributed to be filled out and returned before the program ends.

“ EPA is proud to be a sponsor of this program. It gives high school students hands-on experience in protecting our waters, exposes them to the real world of work, and helps make their classroom courses relevant. It also provides benefits to the operating personnel at the host wastewater treatment facilities. Through the students, they are connected with the communities they serve. They are also energized by the opportunity to work with and assist the students.”

William Muszynski, Deputy
Administrator, U.S. EPA
Region 2

»» YOUTH RECOGNITION AND PUBLICITY

At the completion of the Y&E summer program, the program support organization hosts a “Recognition Day” during which the contributions of the students, youth coordinators, host sites, and host-site employees are recognized. Certificates are given to the students for their successful completion of the program. Certificates are also given to the local host sites and the youth coordinators for their contributions to the success of the program. Local community leaders, environmental agency directors, and the parents of the students are invited to share in the activities.

Typically, the students play a big part in these activities, preparing presentations to demonstrate what they learned, drafting press releases, and in some cases writing their own newsletter. Recognition Days are a good way to publicize the program to let people in the community know about how the host sites are working with the students in a beneficial way. All during the summer program, the youth coordinator should be documenting the experience with pictures and notes. (Tip: Provide the youth coordinator with disposable cameras at the beginning of the season.)



For More Information, contact

- Partnership for Environmental Technology Education (PETE)
584 Main Street
South Portland, ME 04106

Phone: (207) 771-9020
Fax: (207) 771-9028
Email: natlpete@maine.rr.com
- U.S. EPA Office of Wastewater Management's Municipal Assistance Branch
1201 Constitution Avenue, NW (4204-M)
EPA-East; 7th Floor; room 7213
Washington, DC 20004

Phone: 202-564-0753
Fax: 202-501-2396



The background of the entire page is a detailed, light orange-toned map of the African continent. The map shows major cities, rivers, and road networks, providing a geographical context for the theme of the document.

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